



**NAACP**

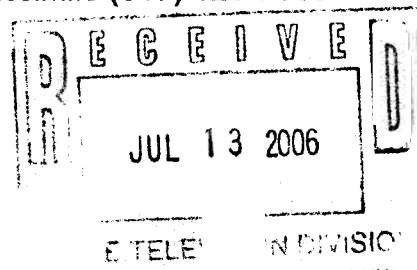
## **NEW ENGLAND AREA CONFERENCE**

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**July 12, 2006**

**Alicia Matthews  
Director, Cable Division  
Department of Telecommunications and Energy  
One South Station  
Boston, MA 02110**

**Dear Director Matthews:**

Those without affordable access to the internet, cable TV and telecom services are at a disadvantage, because these new resources not only provide knowledge – they also provide opportunity.

The NAACP is the largest and most revered civil rights organization in the country. It is also highly regarded as an advocate for the less privileged and disenfranchised. It is within this context that the New England Area Conference of the NAACP adds its voice to the issue of access to new technology. Advancements in technology are the fuel for our growing economy, while access and choice provide the vehicle for one's participation and upward mobility in the expanding economy.

In this information age, television has become an increasingly powerful link to opportunity. TV delivers educational services, news, entertainment, and it links one to the community and the marketplace. The majority of television programming today comes through cable channels. For many, it is a primary lifeline to the rest of the world. It has an extraordinary impact on families, voters and consumers.

In Massachusetts, cable companies have a virtual monopoly in the television marketplace. As a result, most consumers are captive to rising cable prices and sometimes, even poor customer service. Consumers also have less access to video programming options, an important consideration to diverse communities.

Video service delivery, such as cable, is one of the few industries in Massachusetts in which bureaucratic regulations stifle competition. Current regulations of the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Energy (DTE) require that every new cable competitor negotiate cable franchises, town by town, in an open ended process – a process which sometimes exceeds 12 months, empowering existing video service providers, to the disadvantage of consumers.

Existing regulations harm consumers who want; to save money, better access to technology and video service choices. Fortunately the DTE is considering regulatory changes which provide an opportunity to more quickly bring cable competition into our communities.

The consumer perspective should be driving this process. A number of independent studies, including ones by the Federal Communications Commission and the Government Accountability Office, have shown that cable rates have declined in amounts ranging to 25 percent in some communities where competition has become a reality. Massachusetts consumers deserve the same. The ideal policy approach welcomes competition and provides greater access to cable television options while maintaining rules that require all providers to pay their fair share to local communities for legitimate needs, such as franchise fees and public access channels.

Today's bureaucratic cable franchise process delays benefits to Massachusetts' consumers and discourages competition. Changing the process to provide a competitive environment will offer greater video service access to consumers, regardless of where they live, and hopefully; more choices, competitive pricing and better service. The New England Area Conference of the NAACP requests that the DTE develop a new approval process for video service delivery that; is open and fair, encourages competition, is shorter, and provides a more predictable timeframe for the local franchise approval. Consumers will benefit substantially from such a process, particularly those less privileged.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Juan M. Cofield", written over a light blue grid background.

Juan M. Cofield  
President

Cc:

Judith Judson, Chairwoman, DTE  
James Connelly, Commissioner, DTE  
W. Robert Keating, Commissioner, DTE  
Brian Paul Golden, Commissioner, DTE  
Janice Tatarka, Director, Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation